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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the characteristics of alternative secondary education programs in Minnesota for students with special needs or considered to be "at risk." It examines various alternative school options including Area Learning Centers (which provide personalized year round, day and evening programs for learners aged 12 through adult) and the High School Graduation Incentives Option (a "second chance" program). A survey of 83 directors of Minnesota's alternative programs and 85 teachers in such programs was conducted. The directors' survey collected information on: program demographics, admission/exit policies, special education issues, curriculum and student progress procedures, tracking issues, staff demographics, and organization and decision making issues. The teachers' survey asked questions about the teachers' experiences. Results indicated that the schools surveyed tended to be small, have few support services within the school, use community resources to support the curriculum, exhibit a high level of control shared with staff (though such areas as funding and space allocation were usually decided by district administrators), and have teachers who see these schools as not yet meeting their ideal (though much closer to ideal than the conventional high school). Results also support the value of these alternative programs for serving special needs students. Contains four references. (DB)

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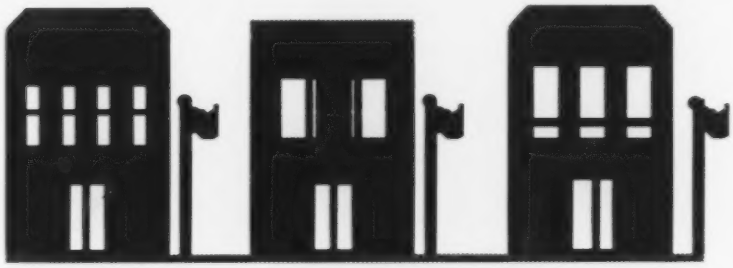

Enrollment Options for Students with Disabilities

Cheryl M. Lange & Sandra J. Sletten

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Research Report No. 16

Characteristics of Alternative Schools and Programs Serving At-Risk Students

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University of Minnesota

September, 1995

Abstract

Data from Kids Count Data Book (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1992) confirm what practitioners repeatedly tell researchers; the number of at-risk youth is increasing at an alarming rate. Many educators are concerned about how the educational system can address the diverse needs of these youth and have developed alternative programs to serve them. Students attending these programs include those identified as having a "special need" as well as though considered "at-risk." Some states have developed school choice options to address the needs of these students that include alternative schools or programs.

This paper addresses the characteristics of programs in a state that has been at the forefront of alternative education and school choice legislation for many years. The characteristics of Minnesota's second chance programs are examined and will provide needed information to stimulate the debate over whether these settings are actually different from the conventional settings and whether they can be successful alternatives to the conventional secondary school.

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Characteristics of Alternative Schools and Programs Serving At-Risk Students

More and more students are being labeled at-risk in our educational system. These students are often behind academically, have dropped out of school, or have been expelled or suspended from conventional high schools. Some states have implemented school choice options that address the needs of these students giving them a choice of an alternative high school setting. These programs commonly referred to as "second chance" programs are designed to address the specific needs of at-risk students. The second chance option combines the pedagogy of alternative programs with the philosophical orientation of school choice offering a "second chance" to those who are failing in the traditional system.

Alternative programs and schools are an integral part of the second chance option. Yet, little is known about the characteristics of these programs and how they relate to school choice. While other types of school choice options have received the majority of attention over the past few years, second chance programs have been quietly addressing the needs of students most disenfranchised from the system. An evaluation of these programs and their effectiveness is important to consider as we contemplate the large numbers of at-risk youth and how to address their needs.

"Alternative" has meant different things to different people over the past several years. As early as 1978 the controversy over the definition of alternative was acknowledged. Arnove and Strout (1978) noted that "the definition of 'alternative' has been a matter of controversy since the early seventies, and much of the literature on the movement has been concerned with that issue alone (p. 79)." Nearly 20 years later there is still discussion about what alternative means. Raywid (1994) notes the variety of definitions surrounding alternative schools. She provides a summary of the different types of alternatives that now appear to be available. These fall into three different categories:

- Type I alternatives are school of choice and are usually popular. They sometimes resemble magnet schools and in some locales constitute some or all of the choice systems. They are likely to reflect programmatic themes or emphases pertaining to content or instructional strategy, or both.

- Type II alternatives are programs to which students are sentenced--usually as one last chance prior to expulsion....Typically, Type II programs focus on behavior modification, and little attention is paid to modifying curriculum or pedagogy.

- Type III alternatives are for students who are presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation--academic, social/emotional, or both. The assumption is that after successful treatment students can return to mainstream programs.

Raywid contends that, "alternative schools are usually identifiable as one of these three types , but particular programs can be a mix."

Sometimes this "mix" of definitions results in a school choice option such as second chance programs. In these programs school choice, remediation, and innovation combine to address the needs of at-risk students. Rather than these being "last chance" programs, these programs provide another chance at success within the educational system. Yet, several questions arise about these hybrid programs. What are the characteristics of these schools? Do these schools maintain the characteristics of alternative schools in their organization and structure? What are the characteristics of the students they serve? Can alternative schools be more than a holding tank for students but an actual first choice for those students who do not desire the conventional high school?

Minnesota has been a leader in the implementation of school choice options including second chance options. In 1987 Minnesota established the High School Graduation Incentives (HSGI) Program that allows students who are at-risk of not completing school, two or more years behind academically, pregnant or a custodial parent, or expelled from school an opportunity to

choose to attend any traditional high school in the state, any alternative school, or any Area Learning Center. In Table 1 definitions for those programs available under the HSGI option are presented.

Many students have chosen this option typically enrolling in an alternative program or Area Learning Center. During the 1993-1994 school year over 30,000 students were enrolled in one of the 140 HSGI alternative programs or schools. Many of these students are most at-risk in our educational system. They include a large number of students identified as having disabilities, such as emotional behavioral disorders, as well as students who are traditionally defined as at-risk.

Whether or not the outcomes for these students improve with the availability of second chance programs has not been determined. Addressing this issue is central to evaluating this type of school choice option. However, before we can consider the option's effectiveness, we must determine the characteristics of the programs. Recognizing that Minnesota's second chance programs (i.e., alternative schools and Area Learning Centers) do not fit the most typical definitions of alternative, it is even more important to identify the characteristics of these programs before we begin an evaluation of their effectiveness.

Raywid (1994) notes that, "two enduring consistencies have characterized alternative schools from the start: they have been designed to respond to a group that appears not to be optimally serviced by the regular program, and consequently they have represented varying degrees of departure from standard school organization, programs, and environments." Minnesota's second chance programs are in response to a specific school population. What is unknown is the amount of departure from the traditional delivery system. Raywid further contends that this "second trait has often linked alternatives to innovation and creativity in both practice and organization." Determining how successful second chance programs are at meeting the needs of a specific population while practicing innovative and creative educational techniques would provide needed information about the possible direction of alternatives and school choice programs.

Table 1

High School Graduation Incentives and Related Options

High School Graduation Incentives Program	Designed for students who are not likely to graduate or who have dropped out of school before getting their diplomas. These learners may choose from a variety of education options to complete the requirements needed to graduate. 1987*
Area Learning Centers	Offer personalized education programs, year round, day and evening, to accommodate the needs of learners. A wide variety of courses, leading to diplomas, are taught using alternative methods of instruction. Additional services are provided to assure each learner's success. Learners aged 12 through adult may attend. 1988*
Public or Private Alternative Programs	Personalize the education of learners at risk of not completing high school. Classes are taught using alternative methods and flexible scheduling. These programs are offered during the typical school day and year. 1987*
Education Programs for Pregnant Minors and Minor Parents	Designed to encourage parenting and pregnant teens to continue their education and receive their high school diplomas. A variety of education options are available. Child care and transportation may be arranged. 1988*

Source: MN Department of Education. *Date of Implementation

There is some evidence that examining the organization of these schools along with the student outcomes will enable policymakers to have a better understanding of their effectiveness. "Looking at the impact of school organization on dropping out thus appears to be a fruitful line of study. But only a handful of researchers have explored the connection between the ways schools are organized and how well students persist in those schools (OERI, 1993)." In this paper, the characteristics of those alternative schools and Area Learning Centers in Minnesota that participate in the High School Graduation Incentives Option or second chance programs are examined.

Method

This study was designed to examine the characteristics of alternative schools and Area Learning Centers (ALCs) in Minnesota. Program characteristics, admission/exit policies, special education issues, curriculum and student progress, student tracking and follow-up, student and staff characteristics, and organization and decision-making were investigated.

Surveys were developed and administered to directors of the state's alternative programs and to science/mathematics, communication, and social studies teachers at a randomly selected group of the state's alternative programs. The first survey was administered in the fall of 1993 to directors of all of Minnesota's alternative programs (n=134). The teachers' survey was distributed in the winter of 1994 (n = 195).

Participants

Directors. All directors named in the 1993 list of Minnesota Alternative Education Programs were chosen to participate in the study. The list included: State Designated Area Learning Centers (ALCs), State Approved Public Alternative Education Programs, and Private Nonsectarian Alternative Programs. The definitions of these programs are presented in Table 1.

Teachers. A stratified sample of alternative programs was selected for the distribution of the teacher survey as the three program options (ALC, private alternative, and public alternative) are unequally represented in the total body of alternative schools in Minnesota. Thirty-eight Area Learning Centers, 11 Private Alternative Schools and 20 Public Alternative Schools were randomly selected for distribution of teacher surveys.

In order to ensure representation by teachers in several subject areas, teachers of three academic disciplines were asked to complete the survey at each site: mathematics/science, English/communication, and social studies.

Procedures

Instruments. An extensive review of the literature and numerous site visits by all research staff members aided in the development of the surveys. Both surveys were designed to gather demographic information about the alternative programs and to elicit information about program components.

The directors' survey asked for a variety of information about the alternative programs. Questions fell under the following categories:

- Program Demographics
- Admission/Exit Policies
- Special Education Issues
- Curriculum and Student Progress Procedures
- Tracking Issues
- Staff demographics
- Organization and Decision Making Issues

Most items offered a multiple choice format with the option of creating an independent response under an "other" category. Several items were open-ended asking respondents to comment in narrative form.

The teachers' survey asked questions about the teachers' personal experiences in the alternative schools. Allocation of teacher time, differences between conventional schools and alternative programs, and freedom and job satisfaction issues were addressed in the survey.

Data Analysis

Nearly all items were analyzed descriptively. In a few cases statistical tests of significance were conducted to determine differences between groups of respondents or factors within an item.

Results

Characteristics of Minnesota's alternative schools and Area Learning Centers were reported by directors and teachers in these settings. Results are presented in two sections with survey results from directors in Section I and teachers in Section II.

Section I: Results from Directors' Survey

Program Demographics

Sixty-two percent (n=83) of respondents completed the survey. Of these respondents, 43% were directors of Area Learning Centers (12 month alternative schools) and 56% were directors at alternative programs (programs either within traditional high schools or at separate settings that operate on the nine month school calendar). Fifty-one percent of the programs had been in operation since 1985. The remaining 49% began operation before 1985, the earliest opening in 1965.

Sources of Information

Most programs were publicized through the conventional high schools (82%) or social service agencies (80%). However, there was a broad array of information sources publicizing the programs. These are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Methods Used to Publicize Programs

n = 83	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Mass Media	39	47
Referrals from Social Service Agencies	66	80
Open House	21	25
Brochures to Parents	23	28
Brochures to other Agencies	43	52
Referrals from High Schools	68	82
Word of Mouth	44	53

School Description

Since there are many different definitions of "alternative" in the education nomenclature, respondents were asked to select the definitions that best defined their programs. These definitions were drawn from Raywid's work with alternative programs (Raywid, 1994). Respondents could select more than one definition. All three definitions were endorsed by a large proportion of respondents. Two definitions "An ALC/alternative school employing innovative instructional methods" (64%) and "An ALC/alternative school providing 'last chance' educational opportunity" (69%) were chosen by the largest percentage of respondents. Interestingly, the third definition, "An ALC/alternative school providing services aimed at remediating educational deficits" (46%) was not chosen by as many respondents even though most of these programs are supported through Minnesota's High School Graduation Incentives program that restricts enrollment to those who are most at-risk academically.

Program Days and Hours. Most programs had flexible schedules that included hours that were expanded beyond the traditional school day.

Availability of Graduation Equivalency Diploma (GED) Program. Directors were asked to indicate if their program had a GED program available to their students. Nineteen percent had the GED program.

Student Characteristics

Directors were also asked to choose the best description of their student population. They were to choose the best definition from a list of three choices. These definitions distinguished between programs that were schools of choice versus those that involved placement of students through other authorities. Sixty percent described their student population as, "students at risk of not completing school who have chosen our school.": In Table 3 the definitions and responses are presented.

Table 3

Descriptions of Student Population

	n = 73	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
1.	Academically Heterogeneous/ Have Chosen the School	10	14
2.	At-Risk of Not Completing School/Placed in the School	10	14
3.	At-Risk of Not Completing School/Chose the School	44	60
	Other	4	5
	1 & 2	2	3
	1 & 3	3	4

Admissions/Exit Policies

Directors were asked several questions about their criteria for admission, enrollment, and exiting procedures. Since students attending these programs have often dropped out of school, we were interested in obtaining information about enrollment and retention rates of these programs.

General Admissions Criteria. Directors were asked to respond to an open ended question asking them to describe the general enrollment criteria they use for student admission. Seventy percent reported using some or all of the criteria listed for Minnesota's High School Graduation Incentives Program. These criteria include:

12 through 16 year olds - Is at least two grade levels below the performance level for students of the same age in a locally determined achievement test; or

- Is at least one year behind in satisfactorily completing course work or obtaining credits for graduation; or
- Is pregnant or is a parent; or
- Has been assessed as chemically dependent; or
- Has been physically or sexually abused; or
- Has experienced mental health problems; or
- Has been homeless sometime in the last 6 months; or
- Has been excluded or expelled from school; or
- Has been referred by the school for enrollment in an eligible program or an alternative program.

16 through 18 year olds *Currently attending school* and

- Is at least two grade levels below the performance level for students of the same age in a locally determined achievement test; or
- Is at least one year behind in satisfactorily completing course work or obtaining credits for graduation; or
- Is pregnant or is a parent; or
- Has been physically or sexually abused; or
- Has experienced mental health problems; or
- Has been homeless sometime in the last 6 months; or
- Has been assessed as chemically dependent; or
- Has been referred by the school for enrollment in an eligible program or an alternative program.

16 through 20 year olds *Not attended school* for at least 15 consecutive school days (excluding those days when school is not in session) and

- Is at least two grade levels below the performance level for students of the same age in a locally determined achievement test; or
- Is at least one year behind in satisfactorily completing course work or obtaining credits for graduation; or
- Is pregnant or is a parent; or
- Has been physically or sexually abused; or
- Has experienced mental health problems; or
- Has been homeless sometime in the last 6 months; or
- Has been assessed as chemically dependent.
- Has been referred by the school for enrollment in an eligible program or an alternative program.

Thirty percent reported a variety of criteria for general admissions that included specific age requirements, student's motivation, and at-risk definitions.

Enrollment. Enrollment at the alternative programs ranged from 8 to 648 students. The majority of the programs had small enrollments with 34% of the programs reporting enrollments from 8 to 50 students. Twenty-six percent of the programs reported enrollments from 51 to 100 students and 25% reported having 101 to 150 students enrolled. The remaining 15% of the programs had larger enrollments from 151 to 648 students.

Since alternative schools and Area Learning Centers are schools of choice in Minnesota, they often enroll students from outside the resident district. Directors were asked to indicate the proportion of students they serve from outside the district. Most programs are serving resident students. Seventy-six percent of the programs had 0% - 30% of their students from outside the district.

Graduation Rates. Directors were asked to report the number of first time applicants enrolled in their programs during the 1990-1991 school year. They were then how many of these students graduated from their programs in the subsequent three years. Respondents were unable to provide adequate data in answer to this question. The mechanisms were not in place that allowed them to access the data in a timely manner.

Special Education Program

Disability Status. Findings from prior research studies of Minnesota's alternative programs found they were often accessed by students with disabilities. More information is needed to understand how these students are being served at these programs. Directors were asked several questions about their special education services and students with disabilities. We were interested in how they determine if a student had been served by special education or had a disability. Most (83%) of the programs learn about the disability status of students through the student records. However, they also learned about their disability status through admissions' interviews, the application, and assessments. Table 4 provides a summary of the ways in which alternative schools determine disability status.

Appropriate for Students with Disabilities. Anecdotal information from directors and teachers indicated that many programs did not serve students with disabilities in the traditional manner. Some incorporated special services into the curriculum and did not have any "special education." Others believed that often alternative programs were not appropriate placements for students with disabilities. Directors were asked to indicate if they believed their programs were appropriate for students with disabilities and to report on the service delivery model for these students if they did attend their schools. The majority of directors (69%) reported their programs were appropriate for some students with disabilities, but not all students with disabilities.

Table 4

Determination of Disability Status

n = 83	Frequency* (n)	Percent (%)
From Application	45	54
During Admissions Interview	61	74
From School Records	69	83
On-site Testing and Assessment	43	52
Do not Formally Gather this Information	09	11
Other	04	05

Note. Respondents could circle all that applied

Many respondents gave reasons for why their programs were not appropriate for all special education students. The lack of special education personnel, open unstructured environment, and accessibility issues were reasons most often reported. These findings are reported in Table 5.

For those programs that did enroll students with disabilities, 57% provided special education services with their own staff and 51% incorporated special education services into their regular curriculum (directors could choose more than one response). The special education delivery systems for these schools are reported in Table 6.

Table 5

Program Appropriate for Students with Disabilities

n = 80	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
All Students	23	29
Some Students	55	69
Not Appropriate	01	01

Table 6

Provision of Special Education Services

n = 81	Frequency* (n)	Percent (%)
We do with own Special Ed. staff	46	57
Our school district does in another building	14	17
Itinerant Special Ed. staff are sent to our building by our district	12	15
We incorporate it into our regular curriculum	41	51
Other	14	17

Note. Respondents could circle all that applied.

Directors were also asked when they assess incoming students to determine if special services are needed. Forty-eight percent assessed students when they were referred by a staff member. Forty-seven percent assessed the student when it was requested by the student or a parent or guardian. Forty-seven percent also used the assessments from the previous schools. Eleven percent of the directors reported they did not deal with any assessments in their program. Respondents could choose more than one response.

Curriculum and Student Progress

Contracts. Directors reported the use of contracts for attendance (64%), fighting/disruptive behavior (43%), and academic progress (66%).

Individual Learning Goals and Curriculum. The majority of programs had students design learning goals upon enrollment (68%). Seventy-two percent report writing their own curriculum in addition to using other types of curricula. These curricula include individualized curriculum for each student (69%), curriculum of the resident school district (45%), computer-based curriculum (28%), and standardized curriculum other than that of the resident district (12%).

Evaluation. Directors reporting using several different methods of evaluation. These included outcomes-based education standards or indicators (72%), staff designed paper and pencil tests (71%), and curriculum-based measurement (63%). Nearly all measured progress toward graduation by the state's credit or unit system (86%).

Organization and Decision-making

One of the major differences cited by school choice advocates between traditional schools and schools of choice is in the area of site-based decision making. We were interested in documenting the level of autonomy at the schools surveyed. Directors were asked to indicate the level of autonomy school personnel experienced by reporting the degree of input district level administrators, schools directors, and school staff had in decision making. Directors were given

a list of 15 areas in which decisions about student program and school organization must be determined. They were asked to rate the level of input for the district administrators, school directors, and school staff for each area using a 5 point Likert scale with 0 representing "no input" to 4 representing "complete control."

A repeated measures analysis of variance using three within-subjects variables was completed. Significant differences were found across all items at the .05 level. T-tests were completed between each variable to determine significant differences. These results are noted in bold and in italics on Table 7.

Table 7

Organization and Decision Making

	District Level Administration		School Director		School Staff	
Decision Areas	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Course Offerings*	**1.56**	1.26	**2.77**	0.79	**3.09**	0.76
Instructional Methods*	**0.92**	0.98	**2.35**	1.05	**3.50**	0.60
Funding Allocation within School*	2.41	1.28	2.79	1.02	2.06	1.10
Admission of Individual Applicants*	**0.95**	0.97	2.86	1.23	2.43	1.25
Dismissal of Students for Behavior*	**0.94**	1.04	3.06	1.06	2.82	0.98
No. of Students Enrolled in the School*	**1.54**	1.35	**3.03**	1.10	2.41	1.27
No. of Students in Classes*	**0.73**	0.93	2.82	1.21	3.01	0.94
Student Transportation*	**2.58**	1.49	**1.94**	1.39	**0.95**	1.31
Special Ed. Services Availability*	2.49	1.22	2.54	1.05	1.98	1.34
Grading and Evaluation Standards*	**1.11**	1.06	**2.65**	1.05	**3.48**	0.50
Curriculum and Texts*	**1.02**	1.04	**2.51**	1.04	**3.56**	0.50
Hiring of Staff*	2.00	1.18	**3.21**	0.61	1.99	1.15
Physical Plant Improvements*	**2.78**	1.24	**2.35**	1.01	**1.74**	1.07
School Evaluation*	**2.18**	1.10	2.99	0.77	2.79	0.88
Student Behavior Standards*	**1.48**	1.16	**3.05**	0.87	**3.31**	0.59

Note. Asterisks indicate significance at the .05 level. Underlined scores indicate a significant difference between the two means. Bold indicates a significant difference between this mean and each of the other means in that row.

Most Important Issues

Alternative programs often face unique challenges as they attempt to educate those students most at-risk of failure in the traditional educational setting. The number of students identified as at-risk is growing and the number of special education students accessing these programs is sizable. Understanding the issues for these programs is important to identifying the directions they will be going as they develop their programs. Directors were asked to indicate the three most important issues their school would be facing in the next two to three years. They were also asked to list the three most important special education issues they would be facing in the next two to three years.

General Issues. Issues relating to building, space, and location were reported by 42% of the directors as being an important issue for their program in the next 2-3 years. Budget and funding issues (32%) and student enrollment issues (29%) were also endorsed by a large percentage of respondents. The 10 most frequently reported reasons are listed in Table 8.

Table 8

Issues of Concern Most Frequently Reported by Directors (Top 10 only)

N=83	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Building/Space/Location	32	42
Budget/Funding	25	32
Student Enrollment	22	29
Staffing	11	14
OBE	08	10
Violence Crime/Gangs	07	09
Materials/Supplies	07	09
Program Direction	07	09
Computers, Technology	06	08
Diversity of Students	06	08

Special Education Issues. A wide variety of special education issues were reported by directors. Only a few of the issues were reported by more than a handful of respondents (n = 62). Twenty-one percent of the directors responding to this item reported the increase in special education students especially those identified as having emotional behavior disabilities as being an important issue to address. Thirteen percent listed compliance with federal requirements and the completion of the individual education program as an important issue. Meeting the needs of students with disabilities was also reported by 13%. In Table 9, the five most frequently reported issues are listed.

Table 9

Special Education Issues of Concern Most Frequently Reported by Directors (Top 5 only)

N=83	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Increase in Special Education Students (especially EBD)	13	21
I.E.P. Compliance/Requirements	08	13
Meeting Special Education Needs	08	13
Testing/Assessments	07	11
Relationship between Alternative Programs and Special Education	07	11

Section II: Results from the Teachers' Survey

Surveys were distributed to teachers at 66 sites. Teachers at 35 sites or 53% returned the surveys (n = 85). Teachers were asked questions about their training, teaching experience at the alternative program and traditional settings, decision-making, teaching activities and materials, independence, and job satisfaction.

Teacher Demographics

Most teachers identified themselves as regular education teachers (96%). However, 29% reported they were special education teachers. Fourteen percent identified themselves as vocational education teachers. Sixty-six percent reported being full-time teachers at the alternative programs. Respondents could choose more than one position title.

We were interested in whether or not teachers volunteered to teach at the alternative setting or if they were assigned to the position. Sixty-four percent indicated they applied to teach at the alternative program and were accepted. Twenty-six percent were invited to teach at the program. Only 1% were involuntarily assigned to their position.

The majority of teachers (69%) had taught at the programs five years or less. Twenty-four percent had taught at the alternative programs 6 to 10 years. Only 8% had taught in these settings for more than 10 years. Most teachers had taught at another school setting at some time in their career. Most (70%) had taught at a public high school.

Time in Instruction

Sixty-nine percent spent from 10% to 20% of their working day preparing for instruction. Sixty-nine percent also reported spending from 0 to 20% of their day instructing the students. The time spent working with students individually varied greatly as did the amount of time spent supervising student seatwork.

Table 10

Decisions/Determination of Curriculum Reported by Teachers

N=84	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
I determine the curriculum	73	86
The school district determines curriculum	21	25
Director determines curriculum	17	20
Staff determines curriculum	25	30
Other	15	18

Curriculum Decisions

When asked who determined the curriculum 86% endorsed themselves as the principal decision-maker. Since respondents could choose more than one response it was evident that curriculum decisions were sometimes made in concert with the school district or the director of the alternative program (see Table 10).

Students with Disabilities

Eighty percent reported they do teach students with disabilities in their programs.

Materials and Activities

Teachers were asked to report how often they used selected educational activities and materials in their day-to-day teaching. Using a five point Likert scale that ranged from never (0) to always (4), their use of activities and materials in three separate settings (alternative school,

conventional school setting, their ideal school setting) were reported. We were interested in a description of their current methods and how their use of activities and materials varied between these three settings.

A repeated measures analysis of variance using three within-subjects variables was completed. Significance differences were found on all items at the .05 level. T-tests were completed between each variable to determine significant differences. The results from the t-tests are noted in bold in Table 11.

Freedom and Satisfaction

Teachers who had previously taught at a conventional school were also asked to rate the amount of freedom they have at the alternative school compared to the freedom at the conventional school. They were asked to rate the amount of freedom using a Likert 5 point scale that ranged from much less freedom (1) to much more freedom (5). Eighty-nine percent of the teachers responding rated their freedom at the alternative school as a 4 or a 5. Ten percent reported the same amount of freedom with no respondents reporting less freedom or much less freedom at the alternative school compared to the conventional school in which they taught.

Teachers who had taught in both settings (n = 73) were also asked to compare their level of job satisfaction between the two settings. Seventy-three percent reported more or much more satisfaction. Sixteen percent reported the same amount of job satisfaction than at the conventional school and 11% reported less satisfaction or much less satisfaction.

Most Important Issues

General Issues. Teachers were asked to identify the three most important issues facing their alternative programs in the next 2-3 years. The greatest percentage reported funding and budget issues (44%). Enrollment concerns/program growth were listed by 24% of the respondents with space being reported by 20%. The 10 most frequently reported reasons are listed in Table 12.

Table 11

Use of Activities and Materials in Alternative, Conventional and Ideal School Settings

	ALC/Alternative School Setting		Conventional School Setting		Ideal School Setting	
Activity/Materials	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Test and Evaluation Forms*	2.59	1.04	**2.97**	0.93	2.67	0.91
Computer Tests*	0.88	1.08	1.00	1.19	**1.59**	1.14
Standardized Tests*	**0.98**	1.05	1.96	1.21	1.51	1.08
Small Group Instruction*	**2.74**	1.10	**1.02**	0.97	**3.13**	0.79
Large Group Instruction*	1.73	1.23	**3.69**	0.60	1.97	1.06
One-on-One Instruction*	2.93	1.02	**1.07**	0.95	2.96	0.81
Peer Tutoring*	1.60	0.94	1.54	1.04	**2.68**	0.82
Cooperative Learning*	1.96	1.00	2.25	1.04	**2.99**	0.78
Homework*	**1.67**	1.46	**3.21**	0.99	**2.67**	1.02
Field Trips*	1.49	1.03	1.25	1.02	**2.68**	0.94
Student Employment*	2.15	1.35	**1.08**	1.07	2.26	1.13
Computerized Instruction*	**1.89**	1.12	**1.21**	1.09	**2.54**	0.92
Emotional Counseling*	2.60	1.27	**1.38**	1.03	2.64	1.02
Career Counseling*	**2.44**	1.18	1.39	1.12	**2.89**	1.13
Academic Counseling*	**2.92**	0.99	**2.02**	0.99	**3.21**	0.76
Socializing with Students*	2.67	1.21	**1.80**	1.24	2.72	1.05
Evaluation with Grades*	2.31	1.54	**3.86**	0.43	2.07	1.36
Cooperation with Other Teachers*	2.22	1.27	1.86	1.30	**3.36**	0.81

Note. Asterisks indicate significance at the .05 level. Bold indicates a significant difference between this mean and the other two in that row.

Table 12

Issues of Concern Most Frequently Reported by Teachers (Top 10 only)

N = 78	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Budget/Finance Issues (Including money for materials)	34	44
Enrollment Concerns, Program Growth	24	31
Space	20	26
Staffing	16	21
Building/Location	15	19
Program Direction	10	13
Curriculum/Program	09	12
Violence/Gangs	07	09
Using Computers/Technology	07	09

Special Education Issues. Teachers were also asked to identify the three most important special education issues they would be facing in the next 2-3 years. There was great variability in the responses from the teachers with few issues being mentioned by more than 10% of the respondents. Issues relating to students with emotional behavior disabilities were mentioned by the greatest percentage of teachers (15%) as were issues relating to compliance with the

Individual Education Program (IEP). A summary of the five most frequently reported responses are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Special Education Issues of Concern Most Frequently Reported by Teachers (Top 5 only)

N=60	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Compliance with Individual Education Programs	09	15
Students with Emotional Behavior Disorders	09	15
Student Assessment/ Testing/Evaluation	07	12
Inclusion of Special Education Students	07	12
Career or Counseling Services	07	12

Discussion

Minnesota's second chance option combines elements of choice, remediation, and innovation to serve primarily at-risk students who are in need of academic remediation or additional emotional or social support. Directors and teachers in the programs provide a more innovative approach to curriculum delivery. Often these programs have varied hours and days allowing students flexibility of schedule.

These schools share many of the characteristics that mark successful alternative programs as outlined by Raywid (1994). They are small (85% of the enrollment is from 8-150 students)

with directors and staff retaining control over major curriculum and program decisions. Teachers choose to teach in the schools and students choose to attend the schools. The programs are often administered by a teacher-administrator. They have few support services within the school; but, use community resources to support their curriculum. Central district administrators have little input in the day-to-day decisions of the school.

Perhaps one the most telling findings in the study is the role district administrators, alternative school directors, and alternative school staff play in the decision-making process for the schools and the students. Central administrators provide more input into decisions about funding, transportation, special education services, hiring of staff, and building improvements. Interestingly, when directors were asked to identify the issues of greatest concern over the next two to three years, the most frequently reported responses are in two areas for which they perceive little control: funding and space allocation.

In all other areas directors reported sharing a high level of control with their staff. Directors report more control over the number of students enrolled in the school with staff having more control over course offerings, instructional methods, grading and evaluation standards, choice of curriculum and texts, and student behavior standards. The director and staff appear to share control over student admissions and dismissal, number of students per class, and the evaluation of the school.

These findings suggest these schools have considerable autonomy from the district in most programmatic areas, but still must depend upon the central administration for two key areas funding and building space. Shared decision-making within the schools appears to be present. In addition, teachers report more freedom at the alternative schools and most report a higher level of job satisfaction when compared to teaching at the conventional high school.

When asked to compare activities and materials used at the conventional school with those used at the alternative school and their ideal school, an interesting pattern emerges. There is a significant difference between the amount of time teachers use specific activities at the alternative school versus the conventional school. When the amount of time teachers would use

these same activities at the alternative school was compared to their ideal school, it appears that some activities and materials are being used to the extent teachers find desirable and in other cases they are not reaching their "ideal" use of the methods.

In several areas, teachers reported significant differences between their use of certain activities in the conventional school versus the alternative school. However, they also indicated they would use them even more in their ideal school. These activities include: small group instruction, computerized instruction, career counseling, and academic counseling. In other areas, there was a significant increase or decrease in the amount of time activities occurred at the alternative school compared to the conventional school and no significant differences noted between the amount of time these activities take place at the alternative school and ideal school. This seemed to indicate a level of satisfaction with how these methods are being used. These activities include: a decrease in large group instruction, an increase in one-on-one instruction, student employment programs, emotional counseling, and socializing with students.

There was not a significant difference between the amount of cooperation occurring between teachers or the amount of time teachers use computer tests, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and field trips when conventional school and the alternative school experiences are compared. Yet, there was a significant difference in how often they would use these activities in their ideal school indicating they would like these activities to occur more often. Interestingly, the findings indicated they would prefer more use of standardized tests than is currently occurring at the alternative schools.

One area for which there was a significant decrease in usage from the conventional to the alternative school to the ideal school was the area of homework. Teachers reported they would have more homework assigned their students in their ideal school than currently occurs at the alternative school.

These findings suggest that teachers at alternative schools do not yet believe their schools meet their concept of the ideal educational environment, but are much closer to reaching this ideal than is the conventional high school. Since the survey only asked teachers to rate the

amount to time or use of various methods and not the reasons for the rating, it is not possible to determine how much effect funding and space allocation issues have on the ability to use desired methods. Understanding the barriers to reaching the "ideal" would be helpful information to consider.

Findings from previous studies indicate that special education students are often enrolling in alternative schools. A1990 survey of Minnesota's alternative schools and Area Learning Centers found that approximately 19% of students enrolled in these programs had a disability. Of this group over 50% were identified as having an emotional behavioral disorder (Ysseldyke & Gorney, 1993). Given the large number of students with disabilities who drop out of school, participation by these students in the second chance programs is not surprising. A report by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1992) notes that, "a recent examination of the status of special education students provides a picture of the characteristics and educational prospects of students with disabilities . Prominent among the finds was evidence that the dropout rates of students with disabilities is almost twenty percent higher than for students in the general population." We know that students with disabilities are at high risk of not completing school, but we are less sure of how to address their needs. Data from this study suggest that students with disabilities are accessing the alternative programs, though many programs do not formally identify students with disabilities and the participation is likely underrepresented in this study. What the enrollment of these students means for alternative programs and for the students, however, has not been determined.

The characteristics described by the respondents suggests an environment conducive to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. The one-to-one tutoring, various evaluation methods, innovative techniques, employment components, and emotional counseling aspects of the alternative schools are elements beneficial to students with disabilities. More information is needed, however, on the actual outcomes for these students, as the findings also suggest that some programs do not believe their schools are appropriate for students with disabilities. Additional research is currently underway by the Enrollment Options for Students with

Disabilities Project at the University of Minnesota documenting outcomes for both students with and without disabilities in these programs. This research will add the needed dimension to understanding the role second chance programs play for both students with disabilities and other students at risk.

Summary. Minnesota's High School Graduation Incentives Program is one model of a second chance school choice program. These programs have distinctive characteristics. They are schools of choice primarily serving at-risk students through flexible, innovative programming. While other forms of choice grab the public's attention, these options are building a constituency of the most at-risk in the educational system. The success of these programs is vital to consider for two reasons: (1) In order to understand their role in school choice movement, we must evaluate them and their effectiveness; and (2) they are addressing the needs of our most disenfranchised from the system. We must try to understand and document what works with these students and the role school reforms such as school choice play in their eventual success.

This study provides the foundation for evaluating second chance programs that use alternative schools and programs such as the HSGI option in Minnesota. Documentation of the characteristics of these programs is an important first step toward looking at student outcomes and program evaluation. With that information, we can begin to address the effectiveness of these programs and implications for their implementation around the country.

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